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Government News Lacks Credibility

By Marquis Childs

ON THE three biggest news stories of the year—Vietnam, the Dominican intervention, the economy—the suspicion is growing that the Johnson Administration is telling considerably less than the truth. On the Dominican tangle the official version of why the United States sent in a force of 22,000 at the peak seems to be in direct variance with the facts.

The outcry over “managed news” that arose in the Kennedy Administration had its phony side since officeholders from the time of Aristides the Just have done their best to put themselves in a good light. But the key word is credibility and when government fails to make its account believable with enough of the truth there is bound to be trouble.

Facts developed in a closed-door investigation by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee into the Dominican crisis show by the testimony of Administration witnesses that the United States had, even before the uprising in Santo Domingo, considered giving the military junta support. As reported by Max Frankel of *The New York Times*, the Administration worked behind the scenes to bolster the military forces while still professing nonintervention. While the news account says the United States contemplated an attack to wipe out the rebel forces if they gained the upper hand, those who sat through all the hearings do not recall that any witness went that far. The testimony is still secret and only a majority vote of the committee can release it.

But what has been made known shows that in the first instance the announcement by the White House of the use of a large American force to rescue stranded Americans in Santo Domingo was a pretext for intervention to get a favorable government. It shows, too, that the criticism of the Dominican action by Sen. J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, is based largely on the still secret testimony.

ON ALUMINUM prices and the threat of heating up the economy with inflationary pressures the Administration, in the view of many observers, has been less than candid. With American boys being drafted in ever-larger numbers to fight and die in Vietnam, the belief is that the public would have willingly accepted a clear declaration that unjustified price rises endanger not only the economy but the prosecution of the war and the future well-being of the Nation.

The Administration has had considerable success in holding down price levels, certainly in comparison with Europe, and it would have been a valid argument that this policy must now be relaxed with the growing pressure of Vietnam. But instead the Administration engaged in double talk that seemed intended to obscure the issue of prices and inflation.

Whether the price increases now rescinded were inflationary or not was debatable. If the Administration had met the issue head on, the debate would have helped to inform the country on the dangers inherent in the boom and how they can be met short of direct controls.

ON THE Vietnamese war the question of official information policy is more complicated. There can be no question but that the movement of additional American troops into the war zone must be held back. At the same time, however, the land war is rapidly escalating with the number of Americans on the ground now put at 160,000. There are rumors that this will go to 250,000 by next March or earlier.

In an atmosphere of growing uneasiness the public is beginning to ask how far this will go. Most of the official reports out of Vietnam tell of American victories, “light” American casualties and large numbers of Vietcong dead.

Where will it end and how will it end? What is the ultimate goal of the United States? These are the troubling questions that come to the fore with more and more insistence.

The President himself, more perhaps than any occupant of the White House in recent times, makes the Government's information policy. By temperament and conviction he holds that all must be for the best in the best possible of worlds. This is part of his American — his Texas — heritage. But as enforced from top to bottom, it leaves little margin for debate and discussion and even less for the frank admission of human error.

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